Advanced Higher Graphic Communication

Class 6: Colour
Lesson 1 – Value

Value is present in all design. It is the lightness or darkness of an object, regardless of colour. Value is relative to the background colour and other items on the page.

Use value to:

• Increase/Decrease Contrast
The greater the difference in value between an object and its background, the greater the contrast

Choose the value that creates the amount of contrast and effect that you want for your design. In the above examples, the lighter value recedes into the light background. The design with the greatest contrast makes the darker object more dominant.

• Create Movement
Objects of the same value create a static design with all objects equal in visual importance. Introducing varying values gives the page a more dynamic appearance and creates a 'pecking order' among the objects. Some stand out while others recede.
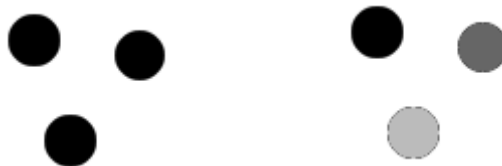
Mix elements of different values to add visual movement to your design or to create a hierarchy of importance.

• Lead the Eye
By creating a pattern of dark to light values, even when the objects are equal in shape and size, it leads the eye in the direction of dark to light.

In the above example, the first set of all dark lines are static. The middle example leads the eye in a downward direction (dark to light). Reversing the values of the lines leads the eye upward.

Use colour to change the effect of value:

Colour has the power to override the effects of value. In a high contrast black & white design, introducing a single, small bit of colour will change the focus and balance of the design.

The eye is drawn to that spot of colour even if other elements are designed to draw the eye in some other direction or the objects are otherwise equal. That's the power of colour.

Go through your Class Samples with an eye on values (whether in black or white or in colour).

Exercise
Go through your class samples and find two to three samples that illustrate the use of value to create contrast (either high contrast or low contrast) and to create random or directed (leading) movement. For each sample, look at the purpose and focus of the piece and decide if, in your opinion, the use of value
1) causes elements of the design to stand out or recede;
2) directs the eye to specific information; or,
3) creates a mood (Describe that mood. Is it quiet elegance, high tech, or playful? Is it high energy or calm and soothing?)

With paper and pencil or in your favourite graphics program, experiment with using value. Draw simple shapes such as circles and squares. Place objects of light to dark on light and dark backgrounds. Mix objects of different values and create static and dynamic groupings. Experiment with using light type on dark backgrounds. Which combinations of light and dark values are easiest to read?

Draw a pattern of uniform black squares or circles on a piece of white paper. Now draw that same pattern but make one of the circles or squares red — just one. How does it change the overall effect?